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CONTENTS

REPORT ON PSI CONFERENCE	1
Charles French	1
BOOK REVIEWS	2
Dr. Wilfred David	2
Glenn Schwartz and the World	3
Beyond the Cosmos	4
Dr. Oliver Lodge	5
PSI, LIBRARY ACQUISITIONS	6
AND QUANTUM PHYSICS	7
Dr. A. Pines	7
SOLUTION	8
Robert J. Gurnea	8
RELIGION AND PARAPSYCHOLOGY	9
Dr. John Allen	9
PSI FACTORS IN THE MIND	10
Carl Jung	10
PSI	11
Charles Psi Parapsychology	12
of the RIME	13
At AAAS	14
Charles Cyril Bell	15
Robert Parapsychology Workshop	16
Parapsychology Exhibits	17
Public Studies at Geneva	18
Visual Study	19
John Hulse, Rochester University	20
Dr. William R. Inge	21
Public Ties	22
Research Director Appointed	23
Charles Parapsychology Society	24
1973 Scholarship Awarded	25
Colloquium in Monte Carlo	26
Dr. Study of Children	27
THIRD & FOURTH	28
Index of Parapsychological Studies	29
Joseph College	30
Low State University	31
Philosophical Fellowship	32
Public Personality	33
University of Copenhagen	34
University of Chicago	35

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TWENTY-THIRD INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE PARAPSYCHOLOGY FOUNDATION

QUANTUM PHYSICS AND PARAPSYCHOLOGY

A Report by Charles French

Five very warm days in August, we against the steam-heated peaks of Mont Blanc, a group of ten scientists met at the Institut Pasteur in Geneva, Switzerland to discuss the field of parapsychology. The occasion was the 23rd annual International Conference sponsored by the Parapsychology Foundation. The ten participants from five different countries were all, by profession or schooling, physicists, and the conference was intriguingly titled "Quantum Physics and Parapsychology." What does quantum physics, a discipline with all many mysteries and paradoxes, have to do with parapsychology? Well that was the topic of the conference. And as its name implies, it was a highly technical meeting—one that generated some bold and imaginative ideas. What follows is a report of the highlights of that gathering.

A cat is in a box with the lid closed. (Schrödinger, Parson or Heisenberg, your choice, for as you will see it makes no difference.) A gun is also in the box. It is rigged to a cosmic ray detector so that the gun will fire a bullet whenever a cosmic bang is detected. Some time passes.

Question: Without opening the box, is the cat dead or alive?

A subtle? Yes it is. A very serious one known to physicists as the famous Einstein-Podolsky-Rosen Paradox. And

the fate of that helpless cat was one major topic of discussion at the Geneva Conference.

But what does the cat parable have to do with the field of parapsychology? Does it require a clarification to solve the mystery?

No, an ordinary physicist can handle it. Make that two physicists; for there are two distinctly different answers to the riddle, and both are correct—hence the name paradox. A classically educated physicist could simply say that the cat is dead. A quantum physicist, however, would have to say that the cat is exactly neither-half alive and neither-half dead, but that there is a fifty-fifty chance that the cat is alive or dead, simply that the cat is half-alive and half-dead. A peculiar state of existence. If that's enough to make the (at present, more apt) it did the same thing in physics.

(Now don't have crises to live with the situation but not necessarily like it.) If the quantum physicist's answer sounds irrational, in a way it is. But wait a minute. . . . Before going any further into the heart of the Geneva meeting, where many of the topics discussed might otherwise sound as peculiar as the famous cat parable, let us go back in time, back to the 1920-1930's when all this confusion began.

Up until that time many scientists thought they had the ultimate, all-encompassing model of the physical world in

Charles French, a physicist, is currently a science writer for *Newswatch* magazine. His most recent book, *Disappearance: The Problem of Consciousness Experiments*, has just been published by Quadrangle/The New York Times Book Co.

sulted in his leaving school in favor of private tutoring. At this time a complete medical and physical examination of the boy revealed nothing abnormal. However, the infestation began growing more intense including a well witnessed levitation of the boy and his mattress. This incredible levitation was repeated several times more in the course of the outbreak both in and out of the boy's home and even at the hospital where he was finally treated. Since the psychiatrists and medical authorities were of little help, the parents began seeking religious counsel. Here another witness enters the scene, the family minister, who observed not only the boy's levitation, but also his violent spasms as he was bounced up and down on the bed. Reportedly a parapsychological group was meeting in the city at the time and allegedly some parapsychologists witnessed these displays.

Six weeks after the onset of the poltergeist the symptoms began evolving into a more conventional possession case. First, the boy began having seizures during which he would be possessed by a new personality and his voice would speak in a "deep, gravelly, raucous voice, using the most obscene and degrading language." This last development led the parents to seek Roman Catholic assistance. The onset of this exorcism stage, when religious authorities tried to rid the boy of the "demon," brought with it even more violent effects. (Remember that the boy and his family were still Lutheran.) The boy was moved out of the city to St. Louis for the exorcism and during the first exorcism rites the 95-pound boy succeeded in ripping

a spring from his bed, broke loose from several attendants, and slashed one of the priest's arms. This was only one of many almost murderous acts he carried out with near superhuman strength. During the ten weeks of exorcism the room's temperature fluctuated and sometimes became icy cold; his whole body became bloated; and he spat directly into the eyes of the exorcist with incredible accuracy, darting his head about like a snake. Lastly he also showed understanding of foreign languages, ability to speak in Latin, and extrasensory awareness of the exorcist's thoughts. Another bizarre feature of the possession was the appearance of welts, in the form of words, on the boy's body. Finally, an explosion-like sound wracked the hospital in which he was being treated which signified the end of the case; the boy was found cured, but with amnesia for the possession fits. The exorcist lost 50 pounds during the ordeal and the boy became Roman Catholic. The victim is still alive and leads a normal adult life with his own family.

Neither the Earling nor the Georgetown case is unique in possession lore. In 1967 Raymond Bayless first postulated that the poltergeist-possession case might represent a syndrome distinct from conventional poltergeist cases.⁷ The following chart is based on cases used by Bayless, Cristiani,¹⁰ and my own historical research. It represents a much abbreviated summary of a few cases showing the psychological and parapsychological phenomenology of the best evidenced poltergeist-possession cases. Note that these poltergeist-possession cases follow a general pattern:

A GENERAL SURVEY OF SELECTED POLTERGEIST-POSSESSION CASES

<i>Date</i>	<i>Place and Subject</i>	<i>Psychological-Physiological Characteristics</i>	<i>Parapsychological Characteristics</i>
1776	Untzell Group possession	Convulsions. Swelling and bloating of the body.	Independent voices. Animal sounds heard, furniture moved telekinetically.
1850	France Helen Poirier	Rigidity of the body; convulsions and contortions; pulled about by invisible force; foamed at the mouth, screamed obscenities.	Raps, levitations of the body, bed shaken, spoke unlearned languages.
1864-1869	Illfurth, France two brothers, aged 7 and 9	Convulsions, whirling around at fantastic speed, rigidity of the body, shouted obscenities, hatred of all religious objects, contortions.	Spoke unlearned languages, predicted future events, levitated objects.
1906-1907	Natal Young girl	Convulsions, swelling of the body, elongation of the body, formation of odd lumps under the skin, aversion to religious objects.	Superphysical elongations, levitations of the body. (Witnesses included one bishop.)
1914	France Young boy	Convulsions, violent reactions to anything religious.	Telekinesis.
1924-1925	Phat-Dien, Viet-Nam Young novice	Hysteria.	Showers of foreign objects, raps, disembodied sounds.

his chart is certainly not exhaustive by any means, is only a rough sampling of the poltergeist-possession forms.

I have now concluded the first part of this paper showing that: (1) demonic possession is of concern to parapsychology and (2) that there is sufficient testimony and material to accept the genuine nature of the syndrome.

Having advanced this position the next problem is shown: how can we explain these cases? Possession cases might be explained by three different hypotheses. These are: (a) That demonic possession is a form of hysteria which uses PK and ESP to reinforce the victim's delusion of demonic control, (b) That it is a conventional poltergeist attack in which the possession syndrome is only auxiliary, being manifested by suggestion or religious belief.

In this case there is no real possession as it is a delusion which is phenomenologically distinct from the poltergeist antics. For the sake of this paper a poltergeist will be defined as a series of PK events precipitated by the inability of the victim which he is projecting unconsciously. This is the commonly accepted explanation for poltergeist. (c) That there exists a phenomenologically distinct possession-poltergeist syndrome which only superficially resembles the conventional poltergeist. In these cases it would appear that indeed a demonic force has taken physical control over a human body. This is, of course, the conventional Catholic viewpoint.¹¹ The pros and cons of each of these theories will now be discussed.

Totally independent and ostensibly evil beings can also easily account for the vicious and even murderous nature of the poltergeist-possession victim, a type of viciousness not found in any phase of conventional mediumship.

I have suggested, along with others¹² that persons in normal frames of mind could employ psi to fulfill needs to reinforce delusional systems. That the hysterical personality might use ESP and PK to reinforce his delusions is theoretically feasible, although factually unsupported. It is well known that many years ago hysteria often manifested in the form of possession symptoms. Pierre Janet in his *L'Automatisme Psychologique* (1888) offered several cases of pseudo-possession, the most famous of which was the case of Achilles. Achilles, a country boy, manifested all the conventional physical symptoms of possession: convulsions, unbelievable contortions, a "demonic entity" which verbally assaulted him, etc. At the same time, these symptoms seem identical to classical possession cases although they do not show any paranormal activity. It seems reasonable that, indeed, hysterics could use their own PK and ESP to give added confirmation to their delusional symptoms. In his cases Janet found fairly consistent psychological dynamics behind them. Usually pseudo-possession was caused by self-guilt. In order to punish the victim to "punish" himself for a moral transgression,

which the victim himself considered a sin (such as infidelity), a delusion of supernatural persecution is built up. The guilt complex, manifesting as possession, is thus fashioned upon his own religious belief systems.

"Could it be . . . that cases of possession are really conventional poltergeist cases in which the delusion of possession arises later and is caused by suggestion?"

Now what are the pros and cons of this theory? First, physically the symptoms of pseudo-possession and classical demoniacal possession are similar—seizures, contortions, loss of autonomic and verbal control, even abnormal bloating of the body. Secondly, there is a curious and stunning sex differentiation and bias in both hysteria and possession. Hysteria is generally held to be more prevalent in women at the ratio of approximately 10 to 1. If one graphs possession cases (that is, ostensibly genuine possession cases), one finds this same approximate ratio of women victims to male victims! Secondly, hysterical reactions (especially conversion reactions) are more prevalent in adolescents and young adults which also is consistent with the fact that demonic possession cases¹³ seem to focus more often on children or young persons than on adults. Finally, there seems to be a noticeable decrease of demonic possession cases in the present century (Nicola estimates it at 20 cases). This could be due to the fact that the Catholic Church keeps such incidents carefully hidden and avoids any publicity about them. So an accurate count is hard to make. Nonetheless some theologians have pointed out that in Western culture, possession cases are getting rarer. This, too, is consistent with the hysteria theory since classical hysteria is also becoming progressively more infrequent in our society.

However, despite these curious parallels there are damning arguments against the hysteria-ESP/PK explanation. Firstly, any person having hysterical traits would reveal them under psychological testing and psychiatric observation. In both the Earling and Georgetown cases psychodiagnostic evaluations of the victims were made, and in each case no hysterical tendencies were found. More specifically, the Georgetown boy was found to be psychologically normal during the initial infestation period of his possession. Any mental dysfunction so great as to cause the total disintegration associated with pseudo-possession or hysteria (and concomitantly needed to invoke poltergeist displays) certainly would have been isolated during the psychiatric observations undertaken. Since it was not, the Georgetown case goes beyond psychiatry—and it takes the whole possession-poltergeist syndrome with it.

Even phenomenologically, hysteria and demonic possession can be contrasted. The demoniac is horrified at the possession symptoms, while in classical hysteria the patient is peculiarly passive, almost indifferent, to his plight. Secondly, and more important, hysteria is projected inward. The victim wishes to punish himself and no one else. Yet diabolical possession cases are vicious, even murderous and

there have been deaths recorded during them. In the Earling case the demoniac almost succeeded in killing Father Steiger at a distance and the Georgetown boy slashed one arm, broke the bones of two attendants, and almost killed his own mother. This is strikingly different from the neurotic self-afflicting plight of the hysteric!

Lastly, the hysteria-psi explanation could still have a glimmer of support if it could be shown that hysterics are prone to show psi abilities. But such is not the case. Although some of the older parapsychologists such as René Sudre, F. W. H. Myers and F. Moser argued that psychic sensitivity was related to hysterical personalities, this view has been discredited. (It is likely that this antiquated view was based on the early association of ESP with hypnosis which, because of the work of Charcot, was thought to be particularly manifest in hysterics.) However, there is no experimental evidence for the existence of ESP or PK sensitivity in hysterics above that of the normal population. Since personality measurements correlated with psi performance have generally shown that neurotic symptoms dull ESP ability, it is unlikely that hysterics would be ESP prone. (See a recent paper and overview by Giorgio Alberti on this topic.)¹⁴ Taken together it would seem that while theoretically possible, the hysteria-ESP/PK explanation for diabolical possession has no support other than a few statistical inferences based on frequency analysis. Further, there are only two poltergeist cases in which the victim showed hysterical personality traits, according to A. R. G. Owen's study of poltergeist effects.

Could it be, though, that cases of possession are really conventional poltergeist cases in which the delusion of possession arises later, and is caused by suggestion? Several cases do indicate this. If one looks over my chart of cases it will be noted that the parapsychological content seems to suggest conventional poltergeist outbreaks. The Phat-Diem 1924-25 case, for example, included showers of objects and raps. It seems likely that in this case the young novice merely was thrown into hysteria by poltergeist antics. Influenced by her religio-cultural beliefs, she rationalized that she was becoming the focus of demonic agencies and this delusion caused a subsequent hysterical pseudo-possession attack.

In several cases, the onset of possession occurred only after the start of the PK effects. In the Georgetown case, the PK effects lasted for over six weeks before the possession phase took over. It was only after the family began to think in terms of demonic possession that the boy began to manifest the classical symptoms. This certainly looks as though suggestion was the root of the possession syndrome. There are other sources of evidence for this simple poltergeist explanation of possession cases. Frank Podmore was the first to note that poltergeists focus predominantly on adolescents, usually female, at an approximate 6 to 1 ratio.¹⁵ This is consistent with the frequency of female over male victims in possession-poltergeist cases. It is also consistent with the finding that a majority of possession cases center on the young. (In recent years, though, there seem to be more male agents than female agents in conventional poltergeist exhibits.)¹⁶ Just as the demoniac is

violently anti-religious, a well-known propensity of the poltergeist is to destroy or telekinetically affect religious objects. This was noted by Herbert Thurston¹⁷ and later emphasized by Bayless.¹⁸

What of the PK phenomena themselves, though? It is here that one begins to see that a different set of manifestations occurs which differentiates between the conventional poltergeist and the possession-poltergeist. To begin with, many of the possession-poltergeist phenomena are identical with those of the conventional poltergeist—telekinesis, odd noises, raps, and, in Hans Bender's cases, the ESP ability of the agent. Even the odd bloating of the human body is known in classical poltergeist cases. Esther, the focus of the Amherst poltergeist, was afflicted with this phenomenon¹⁹ which is also known in hysteria (*aerophagy* and *hysterical meteorism*). Yet possession-poltergeist cases also show several types of phenomena which are very rare and even atypical of the classical poltergeist and it is to this important point that I now wish to turn.

By far the two most frequent paranormal displays shown by the possession-poltergeist are: (1) The agent understanding or using unlearned languages, this being one of the major points for diagnosing demoniacal possession. (2) The levitation of the human body.

Xenoglossy, so common in possession cases, is unheard of in the literature on the classical poltergeist. In fact, the phenomenon is only known in one form in parapsychology—polyglot mediumship in which the medium's communicator (presumably a discarnate entity) employs or understands languages foreign to the psychic. In no poltergeist case recorded, to my knowledge, has this phenomenon ever been recorded. The implication here is great, for if a type of phenomenon occurs prolifically in one syndrome and rarely, if at all, in another syndrome, then this more than suggests that the two syndromes are phenomenologically distinct. Therefore, poltergeist and possession-poltergeist, although resembling each other, may well be two different phenomena.

"What of the PK phenomena themselves, though? It is here that one begins to see that a different set of manifestations occurs which differentiate between the conventional poltergeist and the possession-poltergeist."

Similarly, levitation of the human body is found infrequently in classical poltergeist outbreaks. A. R. G. Owen records in his *Can We Explain the Poltergeist?* that the phenomenon of levitation is conspicuously absent in modern poltergeist cases.²⁰ In reviewing Owen's section on poltergeist levitations, by far the majority of these reports were recorded in classical poltergeist-possession cases. The only modern account of the phenomenon seems to be a case reported by Thurston in 1934 in which a sleeping boy was lifted from his bed. Yet despite this rarity in classical poltergeist cases most possession cases include levitation of the human body. Again this suggests a different

mechanism operating between poltergeist and possession-poltergeist cases.

Lastly, there are a few secondary phenomena known within the possession syndrome which are hardly ever found in poltergeist cases. These would include: prolific independent voices (independent voices are recorded in poltergeist cases but only speak a very few words and usually dissipate shortly after, as I have noted elsewhere);²¹ vomiting gallons (!) of foreign matter; superhuman strength; personality disintegration not associated with the poltergeist; and PK effects over great distances. This last phenomenon deserves special comment. It is well known that the poltergeist centers on an individual and may follow him wherever he goes. However, in possession cases PK effects occur over long distances. In the Earling case, PK-type occurrences broke out in Rev. Steiger's own home—a substantial distance from his church and rectory. This type of persecution-at-a-distance is a well-known and observed trait of the possession, usually plaguing the exorcist and his assistants. One might also note that poltergeists, while destructive, are short-lived and rarely harm anyone; possession-poltergeist cases show the exact opposite. They may go on for years and have resulted in deaths.

In conclusion it seems that while classical poltergeists and possession-poltergeists do share common ground, there are enough points of difference to compel us to believe that they are of an intrinsically different nature. This view is based on the fact that under closer examination they show grossly dissimilar types of PK and ESP effects and show different psychological dimensions.

Lastly we come to the orthodox Catholic viewpoint, that possession is caused by the physical intervention by demonic agencies into human affairs. This viewpoint however is not unique, for it is shared by both Western and Eastern religions and many cases do not center on Catholics. The syndrome cannot be said to be purely a manifestation of the victim's own religious indoctrination. For example, Laurence G. Thompson in his *Chinese Religion: An Introduction*, reprints an account of an eye-witnessed exorcism performed in 1961. In this Oriental case all the physiological features of a Western possession case appeared during which the demoniac revealed superhuman strength, his body bloated, he screamed obscenities, made vicious animal sounds, his body increased in weight to such a degree that his bed collapsed, he tried to kill the exorcist, etc.

The demonic theory can explain the ability of the victim to understand or use foreign languages since it is actually the "demon," not the victim, who is communicating, and controlling the body. Moreover, human ESP cannot explain the ability of a person to employ and properly use a foreign language which has never been studied. In mediumship, xenoglossy is one of the strongest evidences for the survival hypothesis, for no matter how we extend the super-ESP theory, it is hard to believe that via ESP one can instantly master a foreign tongue. Similarly, the ability of the demoniac to use and understand foreign languages indicates that the entity is independent of the

victim and not a manifestation of some fragmentation of the subject's own personality.

The demonic theory also explains the frequency of such phenomenology as independent voices, PK over great distances (since the "demon" could conceivably travel) and types of PK activity not usually associated with human PK ability. Totally independent and ostensibly evil beings can also easily account for the vicious and even murderous nature of the poltergeist-possession victim, a type of viciousness not found in any phase of conventional mediumship. In short, the conventional demonic theory which postulates that the agency manifesting is from without, not from within the victim's own mind, does explain the phenomenology of the poltergeist-possession better than the conventional poltergeist explanation.

Nonetheless, there are still barriers to this explanation. Although demonic possession is a universal phenomenon, cultural differences may be found in various geographical locations. For example, if we compare theological discussions between the exorcist and the "demon" in Western cases²² (as in the Earling case) and similar conversations in Oriental cases,²³ one can find definite culturally oriented differences. This complicates acceptance of a single universal demonic theory (i.e., the Roman Catholic viewpoint) which would suggest that all cases of demoniacal possession are exactly the same phenomenon.

What can we say in conclusion? It is evident that all the theories proposed to account for demonic possession fall short of fitting the evidence precisely. Nonetheless, I can offer my own personal evaluation. Possession cases are more vicious, destructive, and show more violent PK and ESP manifestations than conventional poltergeists or any form of psychic ability whether it be manifested as a haunting, mediumship, or otherwise. Although I find myself in a quandary when it comes to accepting one general theory to account for the possession syndrome (especially because of the universal pattern of female over male ratios in hysteria, poltergeists, and possession chronicles which imply to my mind some sort of connecting link between all three states), my personal predilection is that poltergeist-possession is distinct from conventional poltergeists and are not due to hysterical reactions to the PK incidents nor to suggestion. Because of this, and until more evidence is forthcoming, I favor the demonic theory. Although not a Roman Catholic, it seems to me that the Roman Catholic viewpoint of evil infestation does fit the fact better than any other explanation. And I feel this fit is more than Procrustean. However, although I find the basic Catholic position attractive, I do not accept the dogma about it. To say I accept a demonic theory for possession cases means simply this: that the possessed person is being invaded by a foreign intelligence and that this intelligence is intrinsically evil. I cannot even begin to theorize about the nature of such beings, as to whence they come, whether they are incarnate human personalities, or something beyond. Basing my views on the arguments presented in this paper, I can only conclude that diabolic possession cases which do show PK and ESP concomitants are exactly what they claim to be—the possession of the human mind and body by an independent agency.

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LECTURES & COURSES

Haddon Heights, N.J.

March 23, 1975 the South Jersey Chapter of Spiritual Frontiers Fellowship is presenting a lecture entitled, *The Problem of Ghosts: Religious or Scientific?* Lecturer is Dr. Carroll Nash, Professor of Biology and Director of the Parapsychology Laboratory at St. Joseph's College in Philadelphia.

Martinez, Calif.

At the Institute of Mystical and Parapsychological Studies at the John F. Kennedy University, Martinez, California, students may arrange for tutorial study with an interested faculty member in order to investigate special interest areas in mysticism or parapsychology.

Ottawa, Canada

Beginning in October, Dr. Edwin McMahon and Dr. Peter Campbell of the University of Ottawa in Canada presented a course dealing with research developments in parapsychology and psychical research.

Copenhagen, Denmark

September 3 there was a one-day seminar on Physics, Paraphysics and Psychical Research at the University of Copenhagen in Denmark. Guest speaker was Dr. Helmut Schmidt of the Foundation for Research on the Nature of Man in Durham, North Carolina. The seminar was co-sponsored by the Solid State Physics Laboratory of the University and the Danish Society for Psychical Research.

Philadelphia, Pa.

For the 1974-1975 season the Evening Division of St. Joseph's College in Philadelphia is offering two three-credit courses in ESP. One is called General Parapsychology and the other is Psychic Development. The first college course in parapsychology ever to be offered with laboratory credit will be given in the regular daytime course of studies at St. Joseph's in the 1974-75 academic year.

Instructor is Dr. Carroll B. Nash, Director of the Parapsychology Laboratory of St. Joseph's.

Philadelphia, Pa.

Beginning January 1975, an Introduction to Parapsychology course will be taught at Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The course will be given under the aegis of the Student Development Program of the University. Dr. Jacob Schwartz, president and founder of the Delaware Valley Society of Parapsychology, will teach the course which will explore the philosophic and research implications of the field including an in-depth study of the quantitative and subjective literature. This represents the first time parapsychology has been taught at either of the two major universities in Philadelphia.

San Jose, Calif.

The Extension Service of San Jose State University presented on December 6, 7 and 8 a short course entitled "Psychic Phenomena in the Computer Age." The course surveyed parapsychology's past and present and analyzed the research, terminology and methodology of the field.